



Water Wheel

Being one with all Buddhas, I turn the water wheel of compassion.
—Gate of Sweet Nectar

Collective Atonement

by Katherine Senshin Griffith



Unending wars, continuous revelations of sexual misconduct, ceaseless mass shootings, unattended planetary destruction, widening gulf between rich and poor, rampant greed permeating everywhere, polarized uncompromising factions shooting down all differences, the loss of a sense of truth, trust and respect for all human life.

What is going on? What are we doing? What am I doing? How should we respond? How do I respond? Before the first period of our daily Zazen, we chant together:

All karma ever committed by me since of old, Due to my beginningless greed, hatred, lust, envy, and delusion, Born of my actions, speech, and thought, Now I atone for it all.

It may seem that what is happening is new. Certainly, our increased all-pervasive means of communication makes us more aware than ever. But history since of old reveals that these patterns of human behavior are truly beginningless. The destructive behavior and suffering aren't random but arise from deep forces within the mind that distort how we experience the world.

Have you ever wondered why — even when life seems to be going well — you still feel restless, unsatisfied, or anxious? Why do arguments flare up even when no one wants to hurt each other? Why do we make choices that later bring regret? These same questions can be asked of our collective misbehavior. Why do we start unnecessary wars when we declare we want peace? Why do we vote against what would be most beneficial to everyone? Why do our cultural structures stoke the fires of insatiability and discontent?

Due to my beginningless greed, hatred, lust, envy, and delusion... Buddhism looks into the heart of human experience and asks not only what suffering is, but why do we suffer? And how can we be free from it?

The origins and persistence of this suffering come from three fundamental mental afflictions commonly referred to as the Three Poisons. They are also called the three unwholesome roots, fires, defilements, obstacles or hindrances. These “poisons” aren't physical substances, but mental habits so deeply ingrained in the human mind that they distort how we see the world.

They're not abstract philosophical ideas, but as we are currently witnessing, they are lived realities and the reason we keep going in circles of confusion, anxiety, frustration, and pain. These core drivers of suffering are: Greed (or sensual attachment, clinging, craving, insatiable desire for more); Hatred (or anger, aversion); and Delusion (or ignorance.) With Greed we PULL IN with the endless craving and grasping for more. With Hatred we PUSH AWAY all that we feel aversion, anger, or ill will towards. And with Delusion, we're just in the fog of ignorance and confusion, not seeing the true nature of reality.

These are not sins, moral judgments or metaphysical absolutes. They are habits of perception so ingrained that we often don't even notice them. But they shape our actions, color our thoughts, and fuel the endless cycle of discontent and suffering. These deeply embedded cognitive and emotional tendencies not only play out in our individual lives, but it's what we are seeing writ large collectively. Witnessing the troubles in the world, we can see Greed, Hatred and Delusion.

The Buddha taught that these Three Hindrances are habits of mind that can be observed, understood, and

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COLLECTIVE ATONEMENT *(Continued from page 1)*

ultimately dismantled. We can counteract greed through the cultivation of generosity, selflessness, detachment, and contentment. The antidote to Hatred/Aversion/Anger is the cultivation of loving-kindness, compassion, and goodwill. By understanding that all beings suffer and seek happiness, we can dismantle the illusion of separation and hostility, replacing it with empathy and patience. The remedy for delusion is the development of wisdom through study, mindfulness, contemplation, and meditative insight.

It is challenging to collectively apply these antidotes, when our country's economy is built on us being discontented with what we have, always wanting more, needing to upgrade everything, looking externally for happiness. Our social structures pit one group against another, with a pervasive denial of our innate interconnection.

We may think we believe in our inter-being but if we look closely at our thoughts we can find we habitually separate into tribes, subtly putting others in preconceived boxes that don't reflect the whole of who they are and the karmic factors contributing to the way things are. In our monthly Precept Councils, it's striking how varied and diverse people's experiences and points of view are. This reminds me of a documentary on 9/11 that used home footage from all different points of view. One event. Myriad perspectives.

How can we extend goodwill to those we perceive to be evil? True goodwill might be wishing they would stop their destructive actions and wake up from their delusions. Beyond good wishes, what actions can we take to help make that happen? How can we shift from judgement to discernment, from overwhelming stagnation to beneficial action, from blaming to understanding karma, from passive inaction to engaged equanimity? How can we collectively atone, shift, rise up?

A while back, Zen Center engaged leaders from the Center for Collective Wisdom (C4CW) to share their insights. Collective Wisdom more likely arises when we don't see ourselves as experts, separated from others. Individually, we can help the whole community by constantly seeking to encourage new behavior – tapping into the extraordinary power for innovation and adaptation already present. The power of Collective Wisdom comes from listening beyond the surface to the deeper wisdom in each of us. That itself is waking up from delusion, seeing the whole. Some guiding questions from C4CW include: What is alive here and now? What is the context for encounter? What is already working? What is being kept to the side? What is wanting to happen?

I met a man the other day, who when I told him I worked at a Zen Buddhist Center, said that he appreciated the points of Buddhism but that it was too passive. He wanted a spiritual practice that was more social action oriented. This reflects a mistaken view of Buddhism and true equanimity. The Buddha never taught us to suppress our desires through force. He invited us to examine them, to understand them, and, eventually, outgrow them through wisdom and generosity. Then engaged action can emerge in all its various forms. Even Buddha tried to stop the slaughter of his own Shakya clan.

All karma ever committed by me since of old... Karma is cause and effect. Karma is action. Karma has consequences so our actions matter. We can all change the thrust of our Collective Harmful Karma by truly acknowledging what is right now (no gap at-one-ment). Then make our own internal shift. When seeing the Three Poisons in the world, note it, but also note the quality in ourselves. Don't add more poison. Take a beneficial action, large or small. Do something to lighten the load of those in need, atone and heal this suffering world. There is always a little more we can do.

Deep down people need the wisdom of the ancient sages. How fortunate are we to have the Dharma of the Buddha. If you are despairing, you may be hearing the cries of the world, but you are not in tune with the biggest picture, the Supreme View, the boundless dimension. Grounded in that, we can then respond with urgency to what needs to be done now and for however long it takes.

The Three Poisons are not immutable faults, but modifiable conditions, integral to the causal factors that perpetuate suffering. Truly knowing this, we can guard our own minds and also contribute to beneficial shifts collectively. I created a Three Poisons Metta that might be helpful:

May I be free from Greed, and instead embody selflessness, generosity, detachment, and contentment.
May I be free from Hatred, and instead embody loving-kindness, compassion, patience, and forgiveness.
May I be free from Delusion, and instead embody wisdom, insight, and right understanding.
May I turn all Suffering into Wisdom and Compassion.
May I be free from Greed, Hatred and Delusion. (3x)
May all beings be free from Greed, Hatred and Delusion. (3x)
May all beings be filled with Wisdom and Compassion. (3x)

Sensei Senshin is the ZCLA Head Teacher.

Jukai & the Precepts: Aspects of Life and Practice

by Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert



This spring, we are celebrating four jukai ceremonies, each led by a separate kaishi (precept teacher). In Japanese, the word “jukai” is composed of two kanji. The first, “ju,” means to receive. Maezumi Roshi explained that there is a separate word in Japanese, a homonym (i.e., it is a

different kanji that is also pronounced “ju”) that means to give. So this “ju” can mean either to give or to receive. The second kanji, “kai,” is traditionally translated as “precepts.” But Maezumi Roshi referred to “kai” as “aspects of life.” I first received the precepts in 2001, or 25 years ago, and over the course of this past quarter century, I have begun, bit-by-bit, to understand what Maezumi Roshi meant with this translation.

In the jukai ceremony, the “Ceremony of Receiving the Precepts,” we receive the 16 Zen Bodhisattva Precepts, which include the Three Treasures, the Three Pure Precepts, and the Ten Grave Precepts. These are the same precepts that a person receives during tokudo, or priest ordination, and the same as at denkai, the transmission ceremony that authorizes a person to become a Preceptor (or kaishi) in their own right.

In the Theravadan tradition, as well as in other traditions outside Japan (including, at least the historical Ch’an tradition in China), there are many more precepts (or, perhaps more accurately, rules) that a monk or nun receives. When Dogen Zenji was ordained as a monk in the Tendai sect in Japan in the early 1200s, he received 58 precepts — many fewer than was the norm in “mainland” Buddhism at the time. This ended up being a problem when he traveled to China, because many places where he sought to study refused to admit him because he had not received the “full” set of precepts. Happily, Tiantong Rujing agreed to admit him to practice at Jingde Temple despite this. When Dogen Zenji returned to Japan, he set out, in the *Kyoju-*

kaimon, the sixteen precepts that he considered the core precepts, which we continue to use today.

We say that a person is “receiving” the precepts but, more accurately, they are activating a vow. Chozen Bays Roshi says in her book, *The Vow-Powered Life*, that “Vows act like a conduit for our life energy.” As the preceptor says during the ceremony, jukai is a public confirmation of a person’s intention (or vow) to live an awakened life. What does it look like to live an awakened life? The precepts are our guideposts along this path.



Congratulations Japhy Phoenix-Moon Grant.

Shakyamuni Buddha’s great awakening is expressed in his exclamation under the Bodhi Tree: “How wonderful! I and the great earth and all beings simultaneously achieve the Way.” Do not get stuck in a conceptual “I.” This “I” does not refer to Siddhartha Gautama, as Keizan Zenji emphasizes in the *Denkoroku*. What is this “I”? (I’m not going to answer this for you.) Equally important is this “and.” As Keizan Zenji admonishes us, “Examine carefully, deliberate carefully, and clarify this ‘I’ and this ‘and.’ Even if you clarify the meaning of ‘I,’ but you fail to clarify ‘and,’ you lose the discerning eye.”

Shakyamuni’s awakening to “I and the great earth and all beings” was to the interconnection of life. Roshi Bernie said that his root vow was to “realize and actualize the Oneness of Life.” This “oneness of life” is the core realization on which our practice rests. The precepts are nothing but an articulation of how one lives a life in recognition of this oneness, of the understanding that we are all interconnected.



Congratulations Jerry Ryojiusen Grenard.

In the Zen Peacemaker Order’s statement of the precepts, the first of the Ten Grave Precepts begins, “I will recognize that I am not separate from all that is.” This affirmation undergirds all of the precepts. When we recognize that we are not separate from all that is — which includes the person in the next room, in the next building, in the next town, in the White House, on Skid Row, in the slums and favelas,

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JUKAI AND THE PRECEPTS *(Continued from page 3)*

as well as the plants, the trees, the species on the brink of extinction, and on and on — then we will naturally relate to, and behave in relation to, “all that is” in a completely different way than if we see ourselves as separate and unconnected.

Living in Los Angeles, we can see this play out in our daily lives. In our car culture, we get behind the wheel, close ourselves off, and become an anonymous, faceless creature careening through the streets of the city safely ensconced in a couple of tons of steel. Doing so, our interactions with other drivers are highly conditioned by this anonymous, non-relational identity that we put on when we get behind the wheel and close the door. We are more aggressive, our language becomes more—colorful—and we treat everyone else as an “other” that is in “our” way. But what if you knew that the driver you just refused to let merge into your lane was your mother, or your son? Would you cuss them out quite so freely? Would you turn away?

Social media offers another, modern example of anti-social, atomistic behavior. We see all too frequently on various social media platforms that people, usually behind anonymizing screen names, feel free to post shocking, amoral statements and to engage in flame wars, treating others as, well, the Other.

Sadly, we also see in our society of increasing economic inequality how much the super-rich act under a false belief that the normal rules of behavior do not reach them or that they have no accountability to society. With extraordinary entitlement, they act in ways that are wholly self-regarding and do not reflect any form of communitarian principles. Thinking they own “all that is,” how are they subject to any rules of behavior?

The precepts stand in contrast to this hyper-individualism because they are an expression of what Thich Nhat Hahn called “interbeing.” Closely connected with the precepts are karma and repentance or atonement. While this word “karma” has accumulated a lot of baggage, karma is just the fact of cause and effect — the recognition that everything affects everything else. It is thus simply another expression of the Buddha’s great insight. And the practice of repentance or atonement reflects the fact that, while we make a vow to live a life that embodies this interconnection, our conditioning and self-centeredness often leads us astray, so we repent for our harmful conduct and recommit to our vows.

When we first encounter the precepts, particularly if we come from a Judeo-Christian background, we will see them as commandments or prohibitions — don’t do this, don’t do that, etc. This is not a “wrong” perspective, but it is somewhat brittle and unyielding. It doesn’t grapple

with the messiness and complexity of life. But this clarity can also be tremendously beneficial — there is little wiggle room for our self-centered minds to find an “out.” So “don’t kill” means just that — don’t kill! Don’t lie means, don’t lie! No ifs, ands, or buts. This is the literal perspective.

Right away, with the first grave precept, we see that this literal perspective — don’t kill — while clear, is also impossible to follow unerringly. For me to live, something must die. Even if I choose not to eat, then I am killing myself. So killing is inevitable. What to do? This brings us to the relational perspective. Here, we step out of the black and white of the literal perspective into the multicolored brilliance of life. From here, we bear witness to the entire situation, and take it all into account in setting the direction for our action. In other words, we accept responsibility for our own conduct, know that life is messy, that we make our best efforts and that these efforts will often fall short of some literal/conceptual ideal of the precept, but we act nevertheless. At all times, we connect with the underlying impetus that the precepts are life affirming! Because when the simplicity of the literal perspective is traded for the complexity of the relational, we may get stuck in a recursive loop of bearing witness. But that is not fully living — don’t just be a witness to your own life! So when we get overwhelmed, the simple question to come back to is, “what action affirms life?” Consider this deeply — not conceptually — and go there. Act from there.

Finally, the intrinsic perspective on the precepts sits squarely in the Absolute. From this perspective, there is no killing, nothing to kill, no one to kill. Indeed, the very idea of killing cannot arise, because as soon as there is killing, there is life and death, which are marks of the Relative. While, from the perspective of the Relative, the precepts are about closing gaps, from the perspective of the Absolute, there are no gaps, no such thing as gaps. It is challenging to connect to the precepts from this perspective, and it is dangerous to think you “understand” the intrinsic perspective — dangerous because we can easily take a limited set of “insights” from this Absolute view and import them into our Relative perspectives of the precepts. Such “crossed-wires” have been misused to justify tremendous misconduct by teachers and suffering in others, and is used by armchair “practitioners” to give Buddhists a bad rap (“there’s no ‘you’ to kill, so whatever I do is good”). Once again, return to the touchstone — does my action affirm life?

As Maezumi Roshi said, each precept raises a particular aspect of our life. Each asks us to close the gap that the small-self “I” creates between “me” and “the world.” As such, the precepts are foundational. In the jukai ceremony, we vow to take this as our life practice. How wonderful!

Sensei Dharma-Joy is the Abbot and Head Priest at ZCLA.

How to Practice with Your Hair on Fire

by Erika Tenzin Rinchen Suderburg



Acknowledge that your hair is on fire. Assemble a tool kit. You will need a small spray bottle and a stack of fire blankets (these can be cut into quarters).

Embers are flames now. Your neighbors are being stolen and sometimes killed. You are on stolen land. Your dog is dying. Trans friends are leaving the country, and some have taken their own

lives. There are wars at every coordinate on the globe. Bombing is the reflex reaction to everything. Capitalism consumes all. People debate the word genocide while it continues unabated. Your neighbors are scared to leave their houses. Samsara is on steroids. Has it never been so? The state of rage that you feel is all-consuming and in tandem with your inability to control it.

Douse yourself quickly or apply a fire blanket. Immediately extinguish the fires atop people nearby. Breathing and hugging can commence. Words are not helpful at this point. This is an emergency. Focus on the steam and smoke in the immediate area. Sentient beings around you will become your sole focus. This practiced focus will close the gap between *self* and *other* by shifting gears immediately, focusing solely on what endangers the creatures in your vicinity and beyond. Transfer Ignitions from head-to-head will be thwarted. You will keep guard. You will have purpose and agency. Water will be sprayed. Blankets will be applied. Smoldering will cease temporarily. Repeat as needed. And it will be needed.

This is not only *your* hair. Compress the gap. Obliterate the gap. Yes, embers will subside and reignite, but they will be *our* embers. You will need this attentiveness forever. That is the practice. Eventually, it will help wear down the concrete between self and others, like saltwater working its erosion magic across centuries. Peer under others' fire blankets to make sure embers are extinguished.

You will be on high alert for:

1. Steam coming out of the ears of people around you
2. Signs of righteous indignation (often a raised voice and red face)
3. A misguided ego-centered idea that you can fix anything

4. Donning a beautiful cape when you do not even remotely have superpowers
5. Screaming
6. Tears
7. Affect
8. Stunned silence
9. Sleeping
10. Answering every question
11. Filling the silence
12. Contributing to the low hum of impending doom

Understand that the self is itching to ignite. Your practice is seeing beyond it and realizing the trickster nature of this thing called self. Why is your hair fire more important than the fires of those around you? Scanning only your skull is an impediment. If you use your fire extinguishing blankets generously, you will have a better sense of how to stop the smoldering atop your own head while in service to all the other flaming hair around you.

This is not only *your* hair. Compress the gap.

Your supplies: your blankets, zazen, inside voice, and spray bottles. You will recognize suffering that looks much like your own. Self-focus slams a portal shut. Builds a wall. Weaves the cocoon.

Slings the hammock. Builds the blanket fort. Yes, your hair is on fire, and the brain inside fabricates doom cycles that seem inescapable. We can label it thinking and let it go if we have a little bit of training in watching a cloudless sky turn cloudy.

Zazen does not encourage that disconnection, and it does not suggest that you do anything but seek to close the gap. The gap is mighty. The gap is black and white, the gap is stubbornly binary. The gap is seething. The gap is weeping. But your continuity is also mine. Can one begin to understand one's temporary, fleeting existence as a part of a cycle that can't be altered but must be morphed into on a cellular basis? A self that is mostly misperceived as solid and solitary.

Sky burials require sitting in the charnel grounds watching our meat puppets be picked apart and eaten by creatures who are then well fed. This is a gory and grounding practice. Take your supplies with you and work on closing gaps where you can. Repeat. Try to close the gap. The gap is huge. A good tool kit is indispensable.

ZCLA member Tenzin Rinchen is a filmmaker, writer, and professor emerita of Media and Cultural Studies at UC Riverside and a long-time Buddhist practitioner.

DANA BOOKLET

January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025

Dear Sangha,

As the incoming Development Steward, I have been getting to know all the many ways Buddha Essence Temple manifests as a formless field of benefaction. It is truly a marvel to see how peoples' practice of generosity makes all of this possible, whether that is expressed through volunteer efforts, shared stewardship, service positions, Annual Fund donations, or the Dharma Training Fund. I am also aware that about 33 individuals and couples have joined the Legacy Circle, indicating that they have written bequests into their

estate planning so that their dana may continue to serve for the benefit of future generations. This is truly inspiring. As we look ahead, we recognize the generosity of the following donors for their financial contributions over this past year. May we continue to apply these resources in a way that further polishes the jewel of collective wisdom and awakening, for the sake of all beings everywhere.

With deep gratitude,
Hokyu JL Aronson
Development Steward

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James Sie
Deb Faith-Mind Thoresen



Sangha attending Japhy Phoenix-Moon's jukai.

Letting Go of Thoughts ... on Paper

by Diane Enju Katz



I retired from my last paying job in June 2010 without a plan of action. I worked in my garden, signed up for an acting class, looked longingly at the piano. Then I found a book called *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron, which claimed it would release all of my creative juices. The first recommendation was to write two Morning Pages daily, free-flowing, no stopping. I started the practice

and forgot about the rest of the book. I didn't honor the two-page requirement, just wrote and wrote. I am a pencil user, a mechanical pencil with number 7B lead. I found a notebook made in Spain that had smooth, heavy paper. I loved the feeling of my pencil gliding across the page. I started attending Alanon meetings in 2013 and when I acquired two of their daily readers, I incorporated both of them into the closing of each day's writings. I filled at least two volumes each year. The pages had become my confidante. My writing table was in my zendo, a small room at the back of my home. It had a window and a skylight. I had named it Room of Sweet Light which Roshi Egyoku translated into Japanese, as "Jiko-an."

Years went by: I developed a pattern of looking at the past entries for the current date, keeping the relevant journals on my desk and stacking the other journals on the floor alongside my desk. The stack grew so tall that I had to get a carton for them. I began to think about the life of the journals after my life was over. I did not want anyone to read them posthumously. When I spoke to Roshi Egyoku about this, she assured me that ZCLA would burn the volumes. I wrote a letter with instructions that the carton be shipped to ZCLA and a friend agreed to handle the task.

More years passed; more journals went into the carton. Roshi stepped down from the Mountain. I mentioned my plan to Sensei Dharma-Joy who informed me, very graciously, very firmly, that ZCLA did not have a burning place for so many notebooks.

I continued to write, but no longer looked at the date for every past year, just the date for the preceding two years. I could hear the clock ticking. When I turned eighty in 2024, I thought perhaps this was the time to make a

decision about the fate of the journals. But no, instead I created a different ritual to mark this age. I gathered sand from my home beach in New York City and bottled some water from the Atlantic Ocean and brought both back to Los Angeles. I mixed them with water from the Pacific Ocean and sand from Santa Monica and created a small drip castle. The castle would be washed away by the tide. The journals were still alive.

During 2025, I didn't sit down to write every day. A few days would go by and then I would write again. I noticed that I wasn't missing the practice. During this time, my husband and I had worked with a lawyer to create what we hoped would be the final version of our Trust document. I told the lawyer that I wanted to put in a statement that my friend could remove the carton of journals from the house after I died. He informed me that we had placed our daughter in charge of the contents of the house and that included my carton of journals.



Shortly thereafter, I was at breakfast with a few friends, not close friends but women I had known for more than a decade. The topic of personal papers came up and how to dispose of them. Someone suggested a group burning; this suggestion resonated. The only outdoor places to burn legally in Los Angeles are the fire pits at Dockweiler Beach. Four of us met on Sunday, November 9, 2025. It was a cold, misty morning; our only witnesses were hundreds of sea birds sitting at the shoreline. We lit the fire and each of us spoke. I read my dedication:

I dedicate these pages and their ashes to all beings everywhere.

My words on these many pages have been a great comfort to me, allowing my mind and my body to release thoughts, feelings, inner conversations and dreams.

And I now release these pages.

The time has arrived.

I feel this very moment.

Fifteen years' worth of penciled words on heavy paper turned to ash and dispersed by ocean breezes.

A retired educator, Enju is on the HEAR circle, co-steward of the Monday night Sutra Study, and knits the red capes for ZCLA's Jizos.

A Practice of Being ... and then I got sick

by Julie Getsuan Suhr



Zen practice started in earnest for me in September 2015, when I returned to ZCLA to fully engage the life of the dharma. I had first come to learn zazen back in 1988 when Maezumi Roshi divided his time between ZCLA and Zen Mountain Center in Idyllwild. The format of learning to practice at ZCLA took place over multiple mornings and daylong retreats. During one

particular daylong Saturday, I met Maezumi Roshi. As our circle of perhaps 10 or 15 “newbies” went round and introduced ourselves, Roshi responded to each of us with a question or observation. I introduced myself as very much a beginner but described my wish to try to learn the ways of Zen, Roshi’s response, as I recall, was that there was no try, just do (or not).

The way forward from that time has led to being here now. In fact, I’ve come to realize there is no forward, no backward, no stasis, no achievement (no, really!). No try. Just now, just as all “is,” just as I am. No judgment. If there is a determination, it is to let go of striving and fixing, and let all be as it is, riding on the breath. For the past three years (and most likely somewhat longer), I realize I have been living with an ever-evolving array of symptoms and health challenges that have compelled a vastly simplified way of practice. Perhaps an ancient way akin to shikantaza, just sitting, in its purest form.

*Morning, or perhaps not even yet morning, broad spaciousness
just being, just as all is, as I am.
Eyes that slowly ache awake.
No judgment, no thought. See!*

There is no formal structure to this practice. When I meet with my teacher, I say my name and my practice. It begins by showing up, bowing, and saying, “My practice is showing up to whatever is here moment by moment.” For me, it is a matter of tending to the flow of experience within. I breathe and become aware of anxiety. Next breath, I turn toward it even further, ever softer, with the breath, aware of being that holds no expectation to be other than what it is. And then it may move or change, but with no particular guidance or direction from me. I follow, I attend. Granted, this is after a good nine years of dedicated practice in the formal manner of sesshins, service, chanting, formal meals, bowing and kneeling, cooking and serving meals (which I have really loved). I simply could no longer do that.

It seems there are others in Zen communities and elsewhere, some who are Dharma heirs and teachers, who have realized their beloved practice, the ancient path they’ve walked for so long, can no longer be followed, at least not so strictly. Significant illness, pain or various realities lead elsewhere. So, I share that attention to experience is all, along with blue or stormy skies, a panoply of birds singing, sunlight on leaves, the attentions of my dog and cat, the washing of dishes, medications, and when I can, walking, especially in nature. That is all for now. That is enough, as gratitude for the breath, slow and steady, can be so deeply appreciated.

Through this process I’ve learned that community, Sangha, is vitally important. To know that one is not alone in this experience. To that end, I share some resources for those who may struggle with chronic illness or pain while on the path of mindfulness. First, the writings of Florence Caplow, whose most recent book is *Tend to Your Spirit: Mindful Living with Chronic Illness*, co-written with Julianne Lepp; also, *How to Be Sick: A Buddhist Inspired Guide for the Chronically Ill and Their Caregivers* by Toni Bernard; and finally *Turning Suffering Inside Out: A Zen Approach for Living with Physical and Emotional Pain* by Darlene Cohen. Online groups and classes for those with chronic illness as well as physical and emotional pain are available through the San Francisco Zen Center website at SFZC.org.

To all on this journey, whether now or in the future, I bow.

Julie Getsuan Suhr is a ZCLA member who has worked extensively in the fields of healthcare, education, mental health and publishing. Her current efforts as a writer and poet often explore nature and the psyche. A graduate of UCLA and Pacifica Graduate Institute, she maintains a license as a marriage and family therapist.



The Sacred Mischief Workshop participants.

Meet ZCLA's New Development Steward

by Hokyu JL Aronson



I remember the first time I visited ZCLA. It was October 2012 and I was nearing the end of a three week pilgrimage, from Seattle to San Diego, visiting friends and practice communities along the way. I'm a New Yorker, but I lived in Northern California during my college years before returning East. Although my interest in Buddhism and meditation goes back to

my teenage years, it was in New York in my mid-twenties when my formal practice life began.

In time, I became a formal student in the Mountains and Rivers Order of Zen and soon began doing periods of residential training. In 2012 I decided to take stock of the West Coast scene, checking out as many sanghas as I could, trying to compensate — in a sense — for having passed right by all these places when I was in college and preoccupied with studies, skateboarding, and live music.

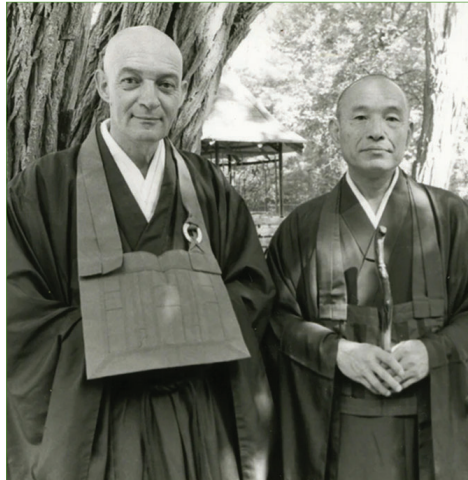
ZCLA was high on my priority list during that survey as its significance was baked into my own lineage. Roshi John Daido Looi, who'd lived and practiced at ZCLA in the 1970s, later became one of my first teachers. When he founded Zen Mountain Monastery (ZMM) in the Catskills Mountains of New York, Daido was not yet empowered to teach, let alone be responsible for a temple. Yet, his ambitions ran high, alongside his self-confidence. Maezumi Roshi, in turn, evidently had great confidence in his student. So, as his father had done upon ZCLA's founding, Maezumi Roshi gave Daido an initial investment and stepped into the largely honorary role of ZMM's first abbot. Maezumi visited New York annually throughout the 1980s until he felt Daido was ready for Dharma transmission.

I never met Maezumi Roshi. He passed away while I was still living in Santa Cruz and I only came to ZMM in 2005, a few years before Daido Roshi himself was diagnosed with advanced lung cancer. However, I did get to encounter Roshi Bernie Glassman when ZMM hosted a gathering of the White Plum Asanga, the affiliate organization of Maezumi Roshi's Dharma descendants.

It took me ten years to get back to ZCLA. By that point, I'd lived and worked full time at Zen Mountain Monastery (and sometimes the Zen Center of New York City) for close to a decade, receiving *tokudo* in 2019. Then, in 2022, I took some time off, heading to California once again. That summer, I spent two weeks at ZCLA, including a special sesshin with Roshi Egyoku. I also got to know the other teachers and staff, including Sensei Senshin — whom I'd also met in 2012 — and Sensei Dharma-Joy.

After two more years back at ZMM, it became clear that I wanted a change. Early last year, I reached out to Sensei Dharma-Joy just to connect. To my immense surprise, he offered me a job. Sensei Myoho, as it turned out, was looking to retire from her role as Temple Development

Steward, a position she served with great distinction for over a dozen years. Sensei Dharma-Joy knew I had a professional background in multi-media and writing, plus fundraising and marketing for non-profits—all skills that I'd subsequently put to use at ZMM. He said he thought I would be perfect for the stewardship role at ZCLA and asked if I would consider it. My response was to say, "Thank you, but I'm on my way to Japan." His response — to my further surprise — was to say, "We can wait."



Roshi Daido Looi (left) with Maezumi Roshi

And so it was that I spent 2025 travelling and only landed back at ZCLA for this new chapter in early February of this year. I am humbled and grateful that this practice opportunity comes after another long wished for practice opportunity: ango in Japan. This was no random wish. Toshoji, the Soto school's official international training temple, had also factored into my lineage. Its abbot, Seido Suzuki Roshi, was tapped by Maezumi Roshi in the early 1980s to help Daido with the formation of ZMM. Seido stayed in New York for two years before returning home, but forever after served as ZMM's link to Japan, inviting Daido Roshi and a number of students to visit and practice with him whenever they wished. I was one of those students when I first visited in 2015 but, at that time, it was only for a week.

To me, there's real value in furthering one's priestly training in a traditional environment. It's not for everyone. Conditions can feel quite austere, for one thing, and it's not always easy to identify what you're *getting* out of the experience. But that is, perhaps, one of the key points. It's

(Continued on page 11)

DEVELOPMENT STEWARD *(Continued from page 10)*

very easy to make our practice all about fulfilling personal needs, even when one of those needs is feeling like a valued and virtuous individual. The three months I spent at Toshoji threw many of those normal orientations out the window. What I was left with was a sense that an endless circle was being looped and that I was merely a thread in this circle, a thread being sewn through a different piece in the pattern. That circle has been my life for a good number of years, and now I get to cycle on into yet another piece, a piece that made my own past possible.

Which brings us to now. There's a lot that I'm learning about this part of the circle we call Buddha Essence Temple. It's a little daunting to step into a central role at a sangha I have not really been a part of before, but many bodhisattvas have reached out a hand to support this transition.

"How can we stay true to a vision in which anyone can find safety here, along with a feeling of belonging?"

And what exactly does the Development Steward do, you might ask? Well, the job falls into a number of categories: membership, fundraising, communications, social media, and outreach, to name the core of it. I think what really enticed me, however, was the following sentence from the job description: "The Development Steward will work with the staff and Board on all aspects of organizational development and growth and drive outreach and community engagement." How cool is that? I mean, all spreadsheets aside, this is like a hot rod enthusiast getting under the hood of a classic 1967 Firebird with the opportunity to tune it up alongside fellow car lovers.

More literally, I get to apply an outside eye to an institution built around continuous growth—the growth of the individual and the growth of the organization. With an insider's eye on what I've seen from other centers, I get to ask questions such as, What's preventing ZCLA from growing in ways that it might like to? What resources are not being tapped? Where are people overstretched and where could their energies be redirected to something more replenishing? How does the Center represent itself in its communications? How can we improve the temple's profile for the sake of the many Angelenos (and "beyonders") who are looking for authentic Zen teachings and training but are not aware of our offerings? And critically, how can we do our very best to ensure that anyone who comes here — or who joins us online — feels honored as the Buddha we're so fond of telling them they already are?

In other words, how can we stay true to a vision in which anyone can find safety here, along with a feeling of belonging? That last piece has no one answer. In fact, I believe it is *the sangha koan*, or one major piece of it. It's a koan we all take up together and may not always agree on, but it is a koan we all must approach with humility, and with some measure of faith in its validity, if we are to continue for anywhere near another 60 years.

Why does asking such questions spark joy for me? Because over the course of my travels, I've seen how sanghas can shine, and I've seen ways they can stay insular, or resistant to change in the name of preserving tradition. I've seen how practice centers can be of great service to some but stymied in their ability to expand that tent to include more diverse groups. And I know what it's like when everyone is working together towards a common vision of *beloved community*.

At the moment, there are many plates spinning in "the development sphere," all designed to open up that tent a little further. A new ZCLA website is in the works, along with an expansion of the recently launched podcast. There will also be videos, new public programs (working in tandem with Program Steward Myoki Beltran-Hernandez), and a 60th anniversary celebration, currently scheduled for June 2027. I'm very fortunate to arrive at a time when Japhy Phoenix-Moon Grant has also shown up with his wealth of experience in digital communications. He and I will be working closely together on the website and social media pieces, in particular.

Finally, just to say, it's been a great pleasure to connect with many among the teaching staff and fellow stewardship staff, and to feel each individual's passion for the Zen Center, for its traditions, and especially for its bright future. I'm looking forward to getting to know more of the sangha as this adventure unfolds and learning from you all. To that end, as I said during a sangha forum at the end of February, I'd love to have tea with anyone at any time and discover how this jewel appears to their eyes. My inbox is also open for questions and comments. I can be reached at developmentsteward@zcla.org.

Thank you for your practice.

A Heartfelt Thank You!

To **Moshe Cohen** (Mr. YooHoo) for leading the Sacred Mischief workshop and giving a levity talk;

To **Senseis Katherine Senshin Griffith, George Mukei Horner, Nem Etsugen Bajra, Jitsujo Gauthier**; and **Preceptor Elizabeth Jiei Cole** for their Dharma talks;

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To our Q1 Day Managers/Head Monitors: **Kaizen and Jusen** (Zendo Co-Stewards), **John Kyogen Rosania, Sensei Mukei, Mats Borges, Toby Keido Rider, Daian, Diane True-Joy Fazio, Banto, Joshin, and Genkai**;

To our Q1 Jikidos: **Genkai, Ryan Rockmore, Mike Radice, Phoenix-Moon, Carrie Helgeson, Julian Kijun Hixson, and Rey Barcelo**;

To our officiants offering Dharma Words: **Senseis Senshin** (Founders, Donors Memorial); **Dharma-Joy** (Parinirvana); **Jitsujo** (Founders);

To those who clean our Altars: **Aaron Mason, Joshin, Jusen, Kaizen, Kijun, Mats Borges, Ryan Rockmore, Sotetsu, and Sensei Mukei**; and to the Jishins who care for the Founders room: **Senseis Dharma-Joy, Gessho, Jitsujo, and Darla Myoho Fjeld; Gikai, Joshin, Jusen, Toby Keido Rider, Kyogen, and Myoki**;

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To all those who helped with the Fushinzamu; our priests who led the Service Position training; **Sensei Senshin** for leading the MU practice;

To our Q1 daily Security detail **Genkai, Kaizen, Mats Borges, Sensei Mukei, Sensei Gessho** (Security Steward), **Mike Radice, and Chris Genzan Hackman** ■

Sangha Rites of Passage

New Members

*Hokyū JL Aronson
Wesley Bakewell
Tomas Foster
Nicolas Saito
Cathy Vartuli*

Jukai

*Japhy Phoenix-Moon Grant
From Sensei Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert, Preceptor
March 8, 2026*

*Jerry Ryojusen Grenard
From Sensei Katherine Senshin Griffith, Preceptor
March 29, 2026*

Corner of Disorder



Jiei's Sacred Mischief workshop's pasta.

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